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Marching through Missouri

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Marching through Missouri

While Franc Wilkie was being exposed to Army life, Alexander Simplot, now an official Special Artist for *Harper's Weekly*, was getting a leisurely first look at the war. Stationed at Cairo, Illinois, Simplot spent much of his time sketching the fortifications, camps, and troops along the river. His drawings were used extensively in *Harper's* to show the buildup of troops in the West for the eventual invasion of the South. Simplot found that his knowledge of the ways of the Mississippi River made it easier for him to describe the strange kind of warships then being built at and near St. Louis.

In addition to avoiding the rigors of camp life, Simplot had another advantage over Wilkie. He was a registered correspondent of a national publication. Wilkie was still merely the correspondent of the *Dubuque Herald*. His pay was ten dollars a month, out of which he was to pay all his own expenses. Wilkie never had to worry about trying to live off ten dollars a month as his position as a war correspondent always made it easy for him to get along, to eat in the officers' mess tent, and to get free use of a horse or a blanket.

Soon, Franc Wilkie was to be more than just a

correspondent for an Iowa newspaper. The Iowa First and Second regiments landed at Hannibal, Missouri, and the first duty of the Iowa First was to take possession of Macon, an important point some 70 miles to the west. Macon was situated at the junction of the Hannibal & St. Joseph and North Missouri railroads, making it an important strategic hamlet. On June 15, Wilkie sent a dispatch back to the *Dubuque Herald* reporting that the Iowans were in firm control of the town and surrounding area.

Wilkie was a newspaperman of the highest caliber. Finding the Macon newspaper — *The Missouri Register* — left abandoned before the advancing Union troops, Wilkie determined to put it back in operation. He obtained the permission of the troop commander to start the newspaper up again. Drafting several printers from one of the Dubuque companies, Wilkie set to work. On Saturday, June 15, 1861, the first and only issue of *Our Whole Union* appeared. About 1,800 copies of the single-sheet paper were printed, and Wilkie explained that "the paper was white, the ink blue, and the whole thing will undoubtedly be read — hence we have a patriotic paper — red, white, and blue." It was probably the only time during the Civil War when one of the first things the "invading" troops did was put out a newspaper. Missouri was torn in allegiance. Although many of its citizens sided with the North, many others sided

with the South. Missouri had already been torn by inner and outer conflict over the Civil War. Wilkie wrote that the newspaper office was not exactly as might be expected:

Men in uniform stand at the cases — a row of gleaming muskets in stacks is before the door, beside which paces a sentinel with a loaded piece — the editor's table is ornamented with a revolver, two bottles of — of — well — something to sustain a drooping spirit weighed down by the responsibilities of his position (editorial) and the dangers of war — a Meerschautn, and a pile of ancient exchanges. Military uniforms hang around the walls, bayonet sheaths litter the floor, revolvers and bowie knives bristle in every belt; and in short, the only resemblance to a printing office, is the click of types, and the familiar music of the press. . . .

Only one issue of the Macon *Our Whole Union* was printed. The Iowans were ordered to move on to new positions. But the one issue that Wilkie had produced was very much noticed. A copy somehow reached St. Louis and in no time at all an agent of the *New York Times* had sent it on to the home office. The editor was pleased with what he read and a messenger was dispatched to find this Franc Wilkie somewhere in Missouri and offer him a position.

At about this time, Wilkie was rolling across the Missouri countryside on a train pulling open cars crowded with soldiers. The Iowa troops were moving deeper into Missouri. As the train approached each clump of trees, the soldiers grasped

their weapons tighter and kept a sharp eye peeled for snipers. Wilkie, for one, began to consider his situation:

. . . As I passed these points, I would mentally resolve myself a great ass (and carry it unanimously too, without debate) for exposing my precious existence to the chances of Missouri buckshot. Suppose some fellow should by mistake give me a dose of those indigestible blue pills? Who'd care for my amiable widow — and where would she get her pension? These other fellows (so I ruminated) if upset, or if they don't get upset, get a pension (or their heirs do,) a nice 160 acres of land, and eleven dollars a month including rations — I get nothing in any such event.

It was true. As a newspaperman, Wilkie did not qualify for a government pension. Since the *Dubuque Herald* had not paid him one cent, Wilkie was in dire straits. It was shortly after Wilkie bewailed his situation that the messenger from the *New York Times* arrived. Suddenly the little country journalist from Iowa was the Western War Correspondent for the recently-founded *New York Times*, one of the growing newspapers of New York, in the city which was the hub of the journalistic world. It was beyond Franc Wilkie's wildest dreams. He was to be paid \$7.50 for each column of type he produced and his expenses were to be paid also. It was proper to have a "pen name" which would be signed to his articles in the *Times*. Wilkie decided on the name "Galway," taken from a town in which he had lived before moving west to Saratoga County, New York.

The Iowa First was now under the command of General Nathaniel Lyon, who soon after Fort Sumter had forced the surrender of Confederate militia in St. Louis and raised his own troop of volunteers. He was now engaged in chasing the Confederates across Missouri, would eventually overextend his supply lines, and meet death and defeat. The Iowa troops were part of an army of 2,700 troops, four pieces of artillery, and 150 wagons. They were soon joined by Major Samuel D. Sturgis and some 3,000 men, six artillery pieces, and two howitzers.

The Iowans were moving deeper into dangerous territory and Wilkie noted that even Chaplain Fuller was wearing a sword on his hip and had a revolver stuck in his breast pocket. He also noted, however, that he doubted much if Chaplain Fuller "can tell whether you stab a man with a revolver, or shoot him with a sword."

The Iowans covered the 60 miles between Renick, Missouri, and Boonville, on the Missouri River, in 48 hours in a blazing sun. There were several minor skirmishes along the way, but no major, or even minor engagements, and Wilkie remarked that the biggest danger facing the Union troops now was the danger that they would shoot themselves accidentally with their own weapons:

. . . Many of our recruits never saw a gun before, and are about as competent to be trusted with a loaded firearm, as would be a mule or a half-witted jackass. In fact,

I regard the danger arising from the carelessness of our own soldiers to be infinitely greater than that contained in all the deadly weapons in the hands of all our enemies in Missouri. All the blood yet spilt from the veins of the Iowa Regiment, has been let out by the members of the same. If they shoot as many of their enemies during the campaign as they do of themselves, they will make themselves immortal for their heroism and daring.

Heavy rains at Boonville kept the Union troops bottled up for about eight days. The correspondent of the *New York Times* and the *Dubuque Herald* used the time to study the famous General Lyon, whom he described as about five feet, eight inches tall and 140 to 150 pounds, wiry in build, and tough looking in appearance. His hair was worn long and thick, his whiskers bushy and heavy, both of a sandy color. General Lyon also wore a perpetual frown. Wilkie wrote:

. . . He smiles little or none, is a strict disciplinarian, has the full confidence of his men, among whom, or at least among the Regulars, he is known as "Daddy." A lot [of] Regulars will be scuffling on their campus — somebody calls out, "Daddy is coming!" and in an instant everything is as quiet as a meeting house. He goes absently along, plucking his beard carelessly with one hand, stopping here and there to give some order to ask some question in a harsh, authoritative voice, and is a sort of man that one will stop to take a good look at as he passes. I don't think he has anything like physical fear — is all through a soldier, and will yet make his mark high in the military world.

The rains ended and the troops began their

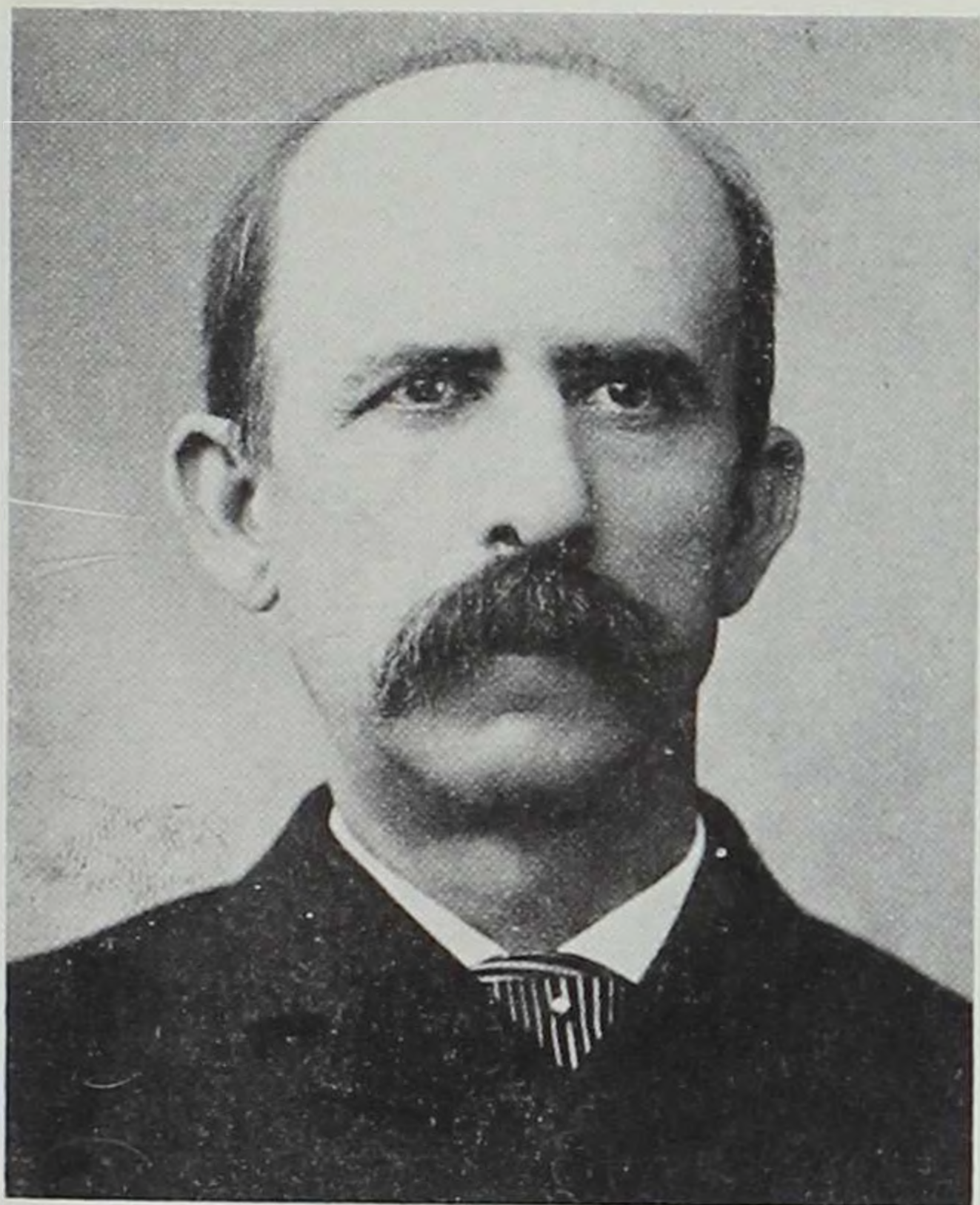
march. Wilkie made sure that the folks back home knew just what such a march was like. He pointed out that it was no grand parade, just a large group of men — dirty, swarthy, and sun burned — with real guns loaded with real bullets. The order of the march began with a company of Regulars, armed with rifled muskets; then 100 pioneers, carrying long, heavy sword bayonets at their side, on their backs, Sharpe's rifles, around their waists, 50 rounds of cartridges, and in their hands, shovels, axes, and pickaxes. Next came the artillery, each gun drawn by four powerful horses and with four cannoneers running at each wheel. Relays of harnessed led horses followed. Then came 1,000 men from Iowa, described by Wilkie as "big, powerful men, but ragged and dirty. . ." The lack of proper uniforms and weapons for the Iowans was to be a sore point for some time. Next in the line of march came 1,000 St. Louis men and Wilkie pointed out they were all dressed in blue, each carried forty rounds of cartridges, and they were armed with "glittering muskets." Then came the tremendous amount of wagons needed to bear the army's supplies, stretching almost two miles in length, then a drove of cattle, and finally a company of men selected as the rear guard. Behind each detachment or regiment of men marched its physician. If a soldier fell out of line because of sickness or fatigue, the physician might send him back to a wagon provided for such cases.

General Lyon, in an old white felt hat, was mounted on an iron-grey stallion and surrounded by his personal bodyguard. They were ten St. Louis German butchers, mounted each on his own horse and armed with heavy cavalry sabres and holster revolvers. Right behind the General rode war correspondent Franc Wilkie, "spurring a female mule, mainly remarkable for ears and laziness." The march covered 200 miles from July 3 to July 13 and ended at Springfield, Missouri.

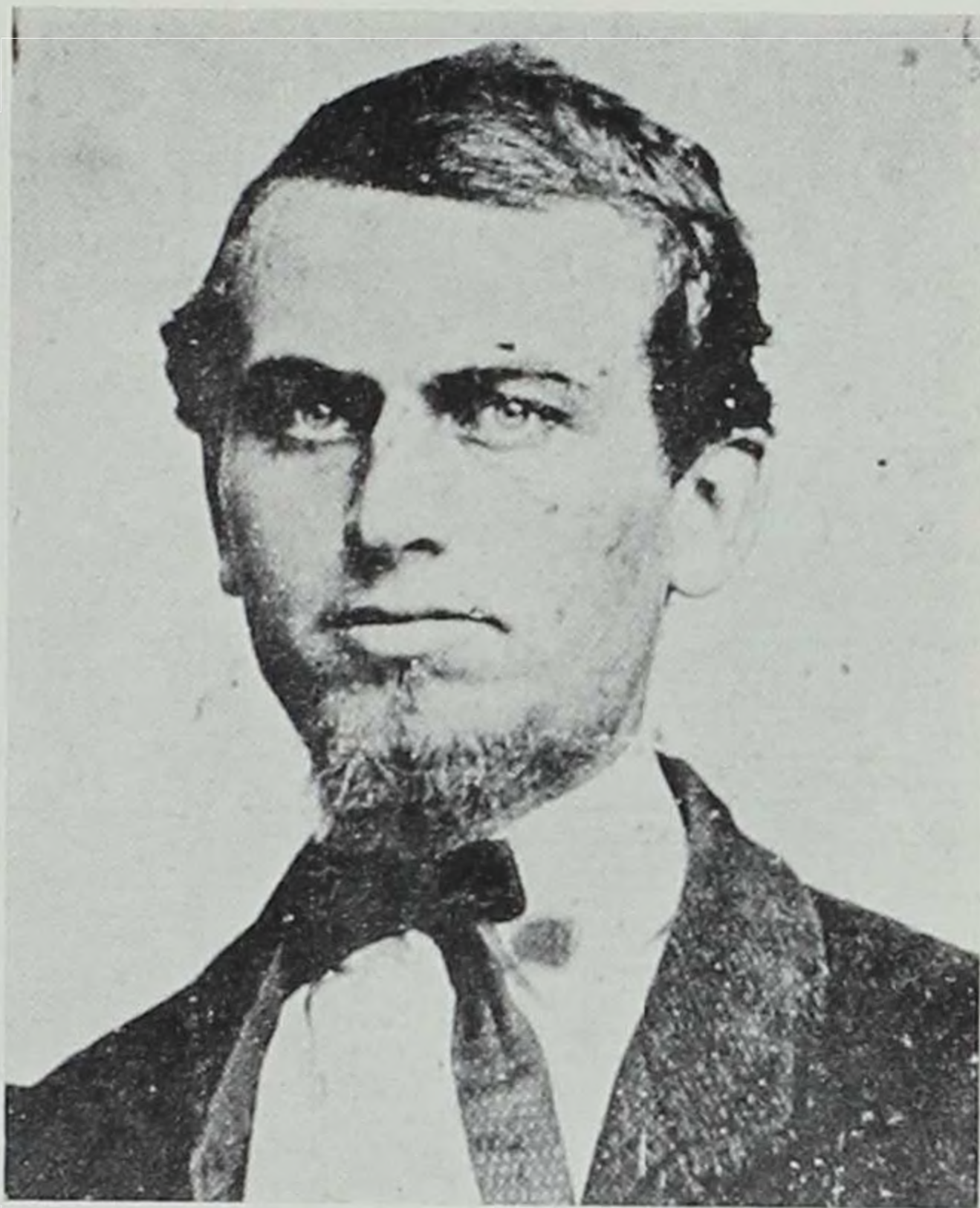
The Iowa troops were still without their uniforms, which had been shipped to Hannibal after they left. Wilkie wrote of the sight and plight of the Iowa troops:

. . . Talk of scare-crows — you ought to see crows, buzzards, rabbits, and everything else with legs and wings, "get up and *git*" the very instant an Iowa man comes in sight — there's no stopping for a second look — they "put" instantly as if "sent for," and never are known to venture in that vicinity again.

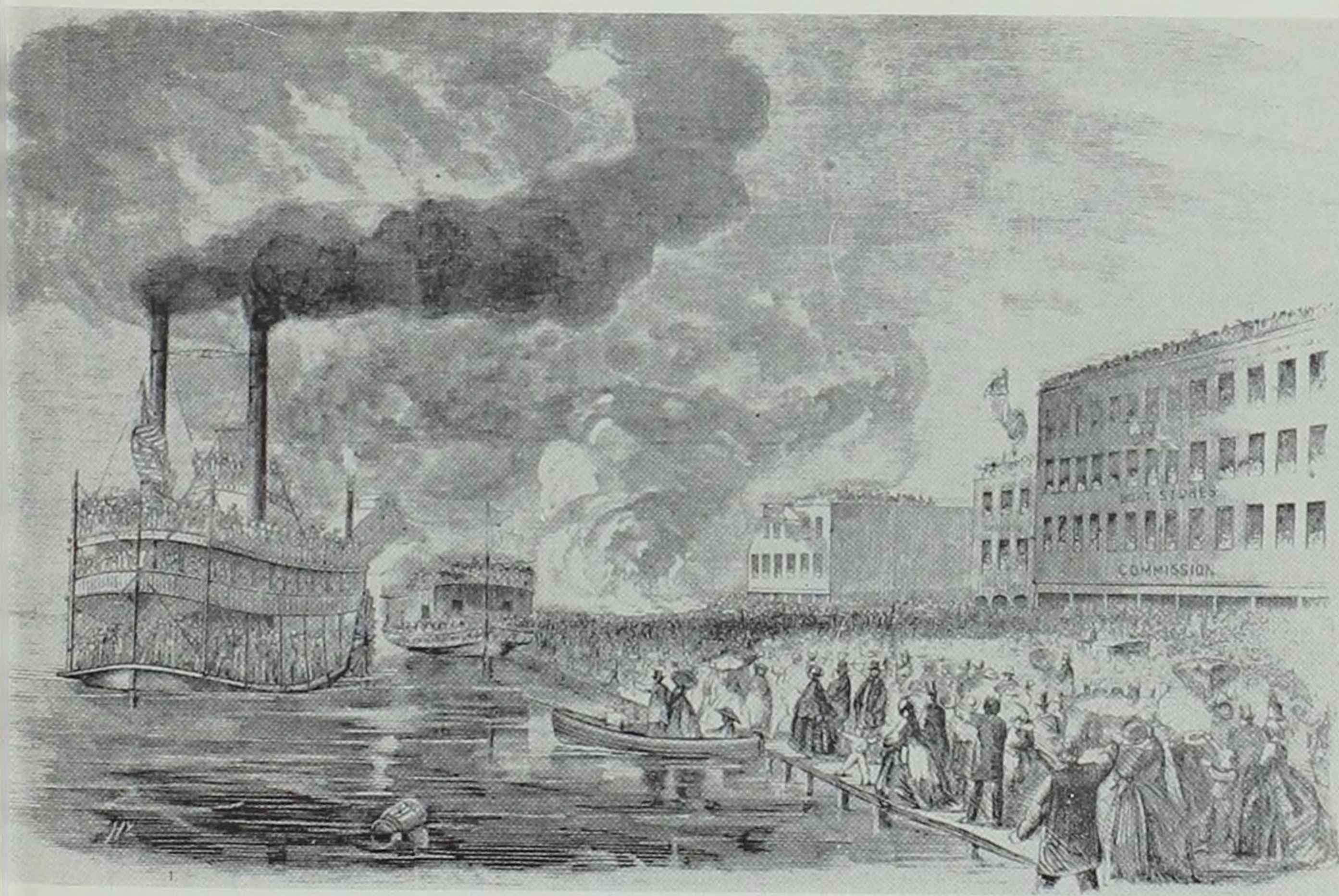
While waiting for the "big battle" that was sure to come, Wilkie took part in a minor skirmish at Forsyth, about 60 miles from Springfield. A force of Federal troops drove out and broke up a Secession camp at that town. It was here that Wilkie received his only wound of the war. After the short battle, Wilkie, a captain, and a sergeant went to inspect the top floor of the three-story brick courthouse in the town. The captain was about to sit down at one side of the table and



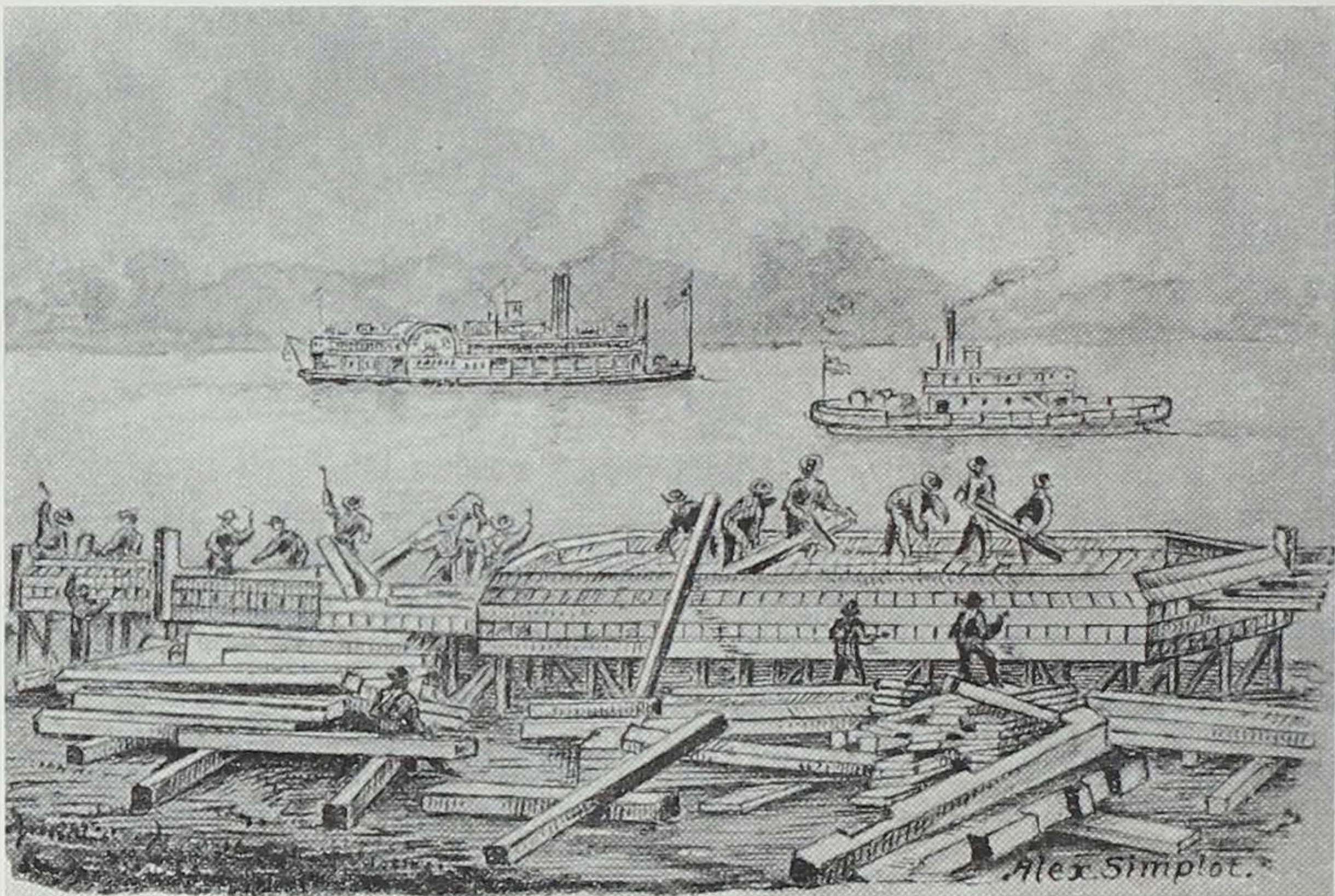
Chicago Historical Society
FRANC B. WILKIE
War Correspondent



ALEXANDER SIMPLOT
"Special Artist"



From *Harper's Weekly*, May 25, 1861
The Governor's Greys and Jackson Guards leaving Dubuque in 1861.



Harper's Weekly, October 12, 1861

Courtesy Wisconsin Historical Society

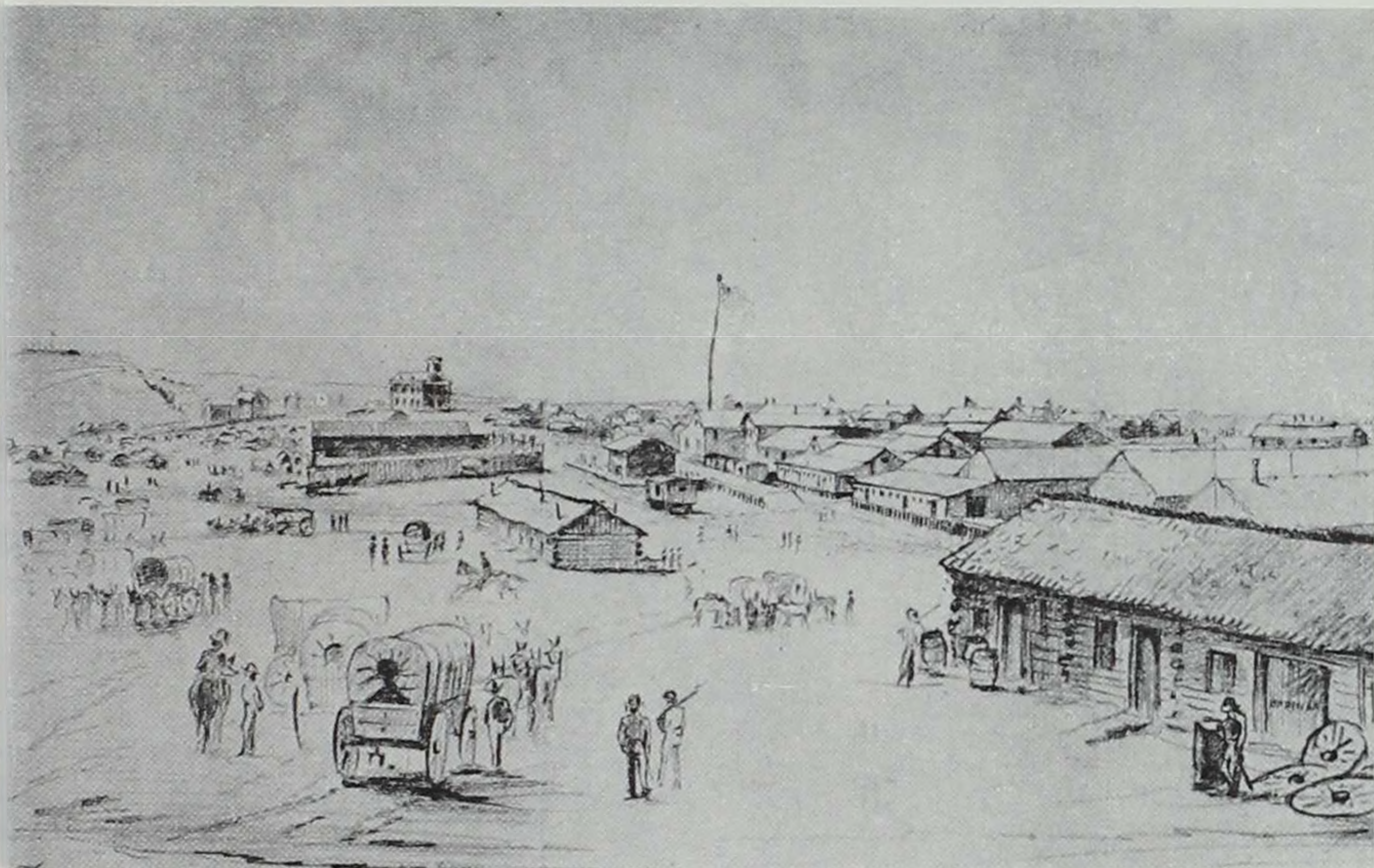
Building Pontoons at St. Louis for the Mississippi Campaigns



Harper's Weekly, January 18, 1862

Courtesy Clayton J. Metz

Applying for Passes at Provost Marshal's Office in St. Louis.



Missouri Historical Society

Headquarters of the "Army of the Frontier" under General Herron at Rolla, Missouri.



LIEUT. MORRISSEY AND THE MIDNIGHT RIDE AT WARSAW MO.

Courtesy John Simplot

Lieutenant Morrissey and the Midnight Ride outside of our Lines to Discover Contraband Goods in a Private Home at Warsaw, Missouri.



Harper's Weekly, November 16, 1861

Courtesy Clayton J. Met

March of General John C. Fremont's Army through Southwestern Missouri.



Courtesy Mrs. Jeanne O'Hanlon

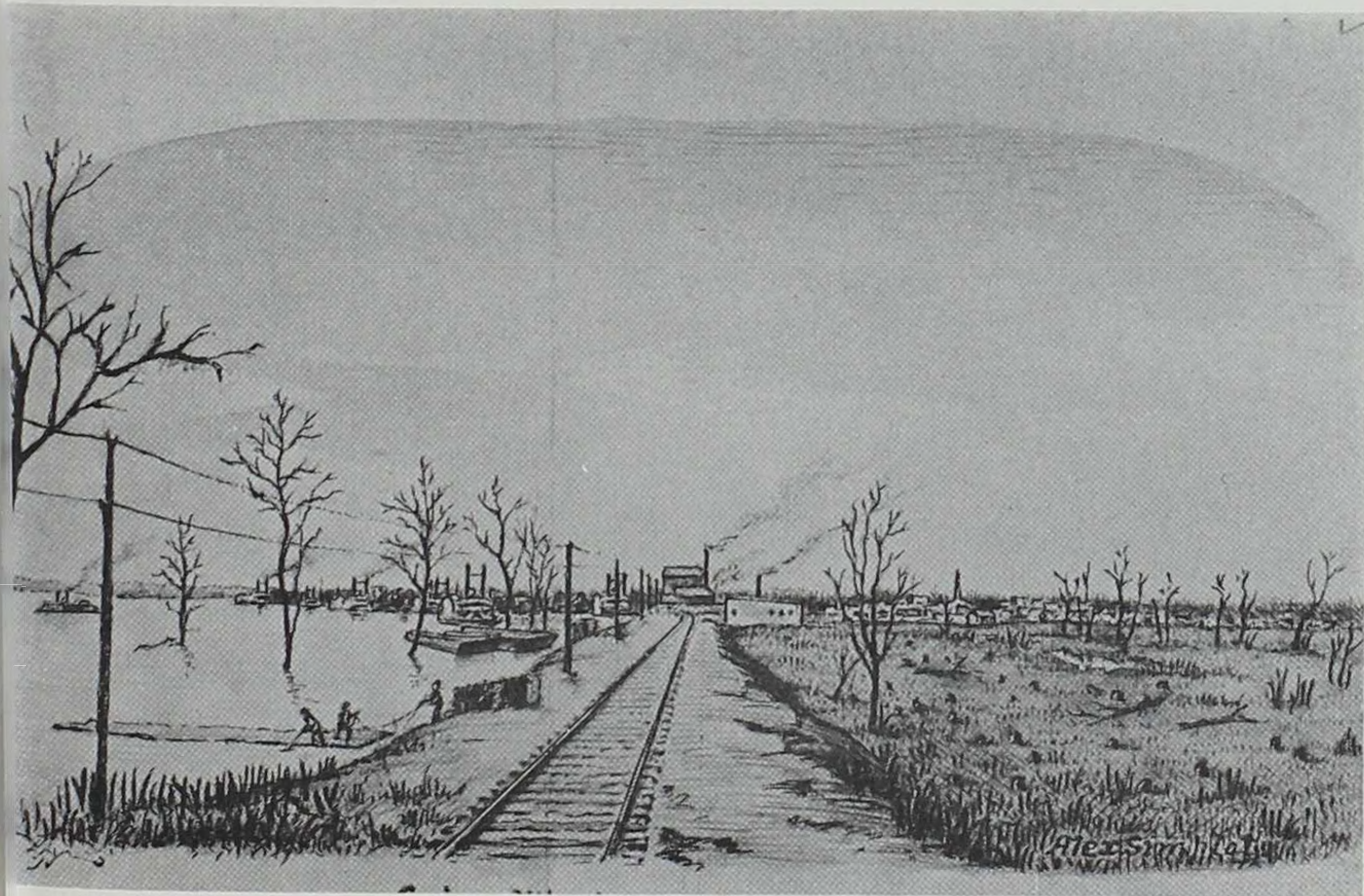
Fremont's Bodyguard Attack 2,500 Rebels on Wilson's Creek, near Springfield.



Harper's Weekly, October 26, 1861

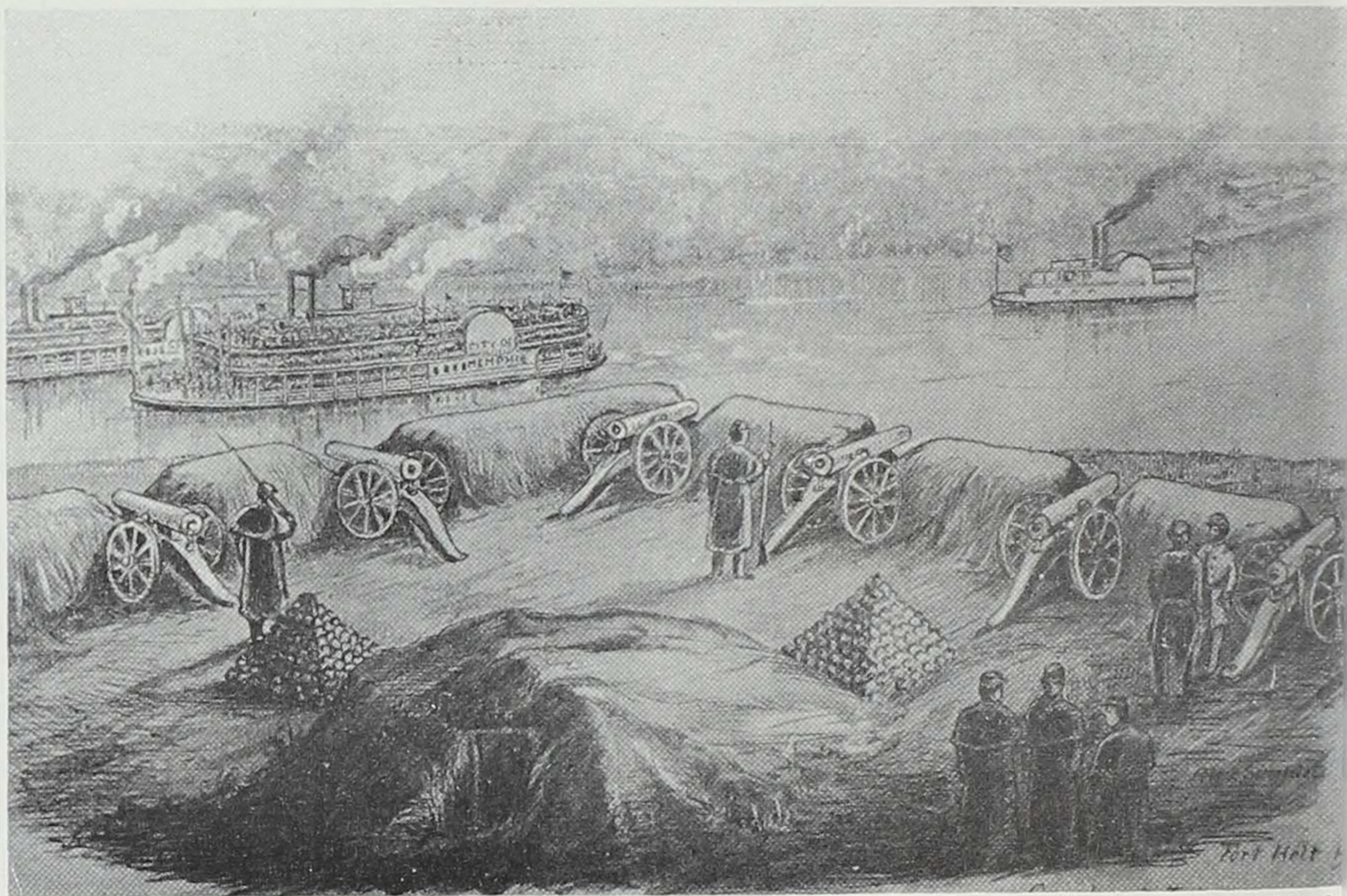
Courtesy Mrs. Jeanne O'Hanlon

General Fremont's Camp near Jefferson City, Missouri.



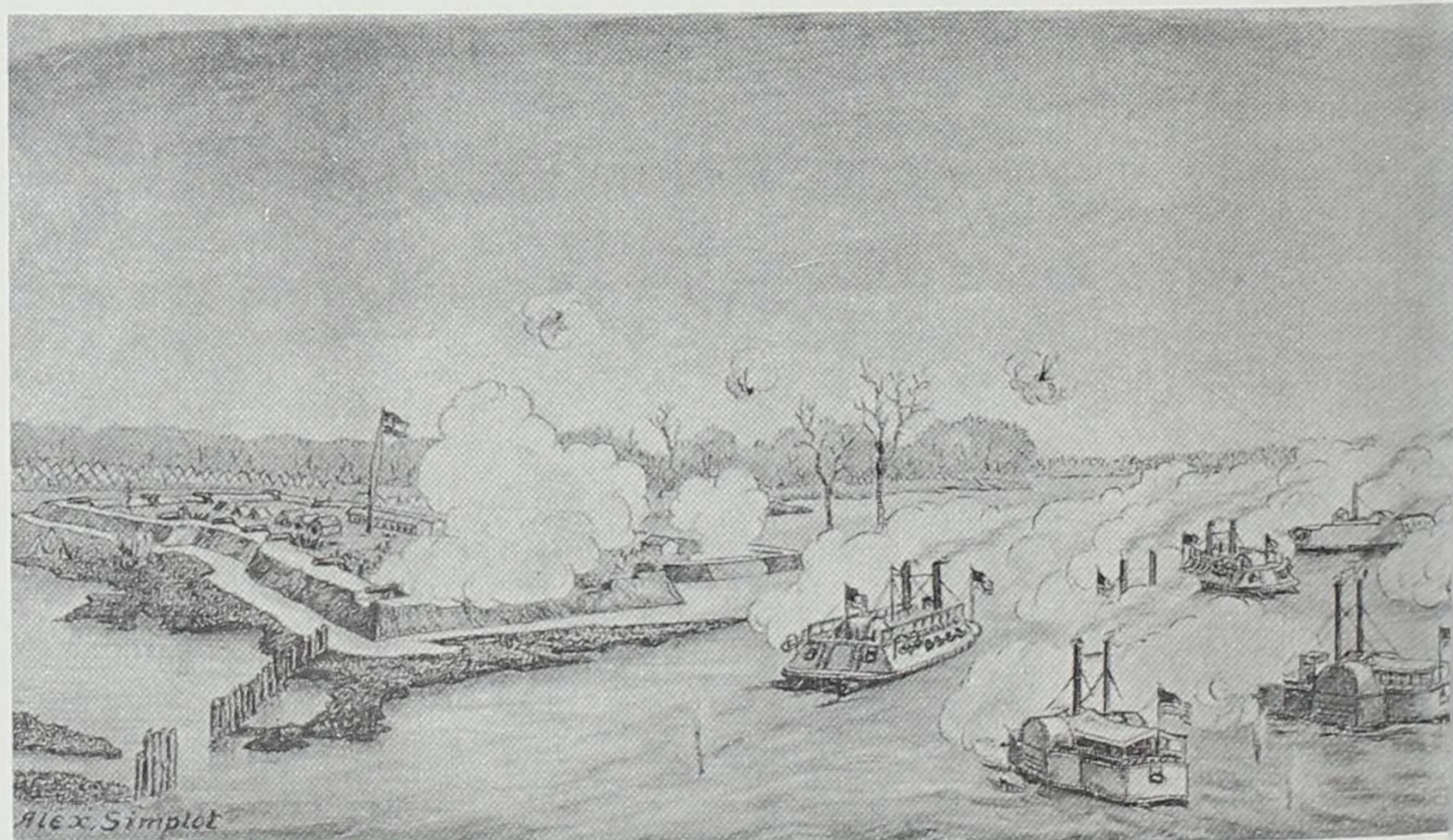
Courtesy Clayton J. Metz

Cairo, Illinois, at High Water — March 13, 1862. Gunboat *Cincinnati* on left.



Courtesy Richard Simple

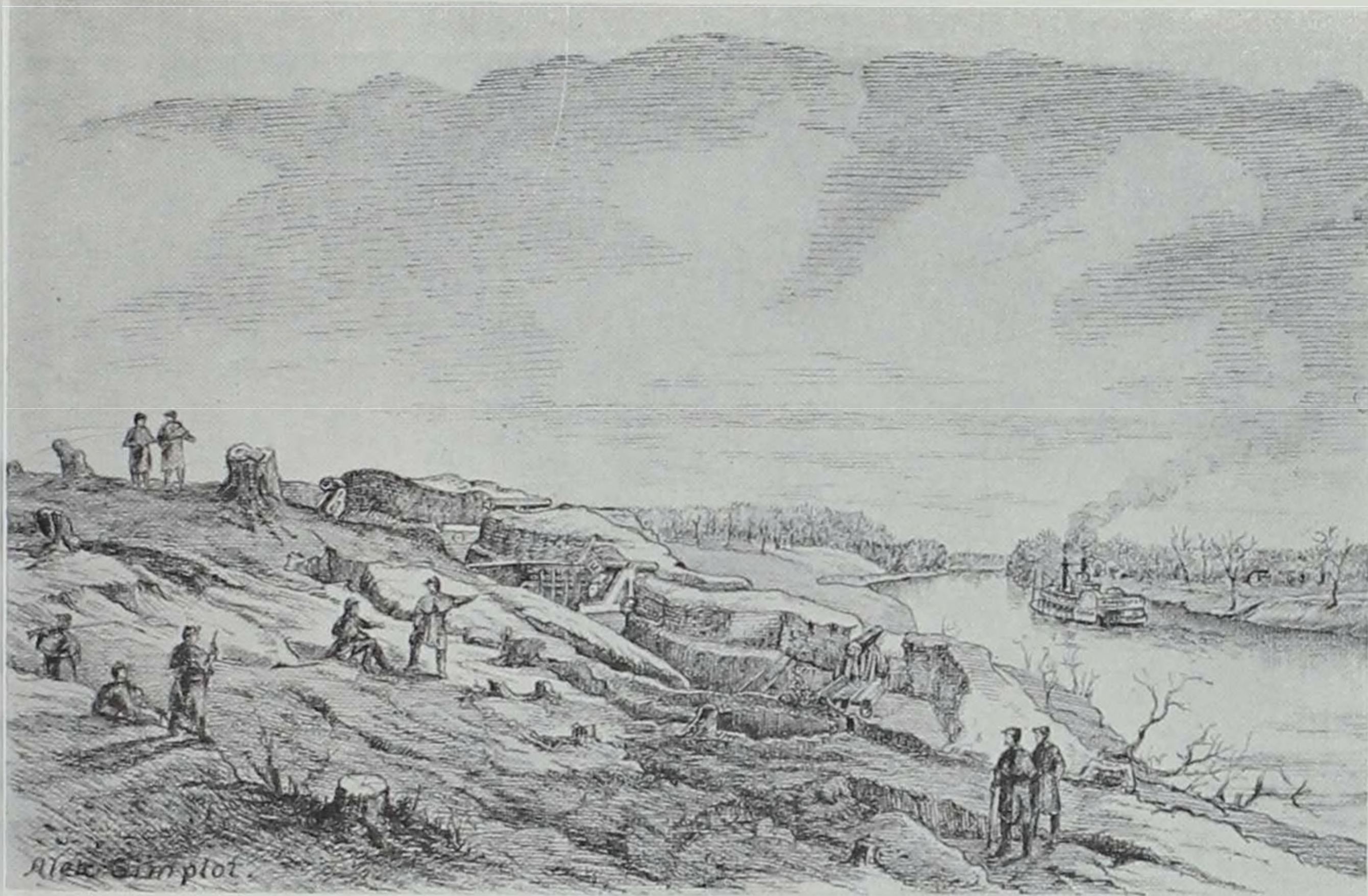
Fort Prentiss, Cairo. Transports bringing Union Troops from the North.



Harper's Weekly, March 1, 1862

Courtesy Clayton J. Me

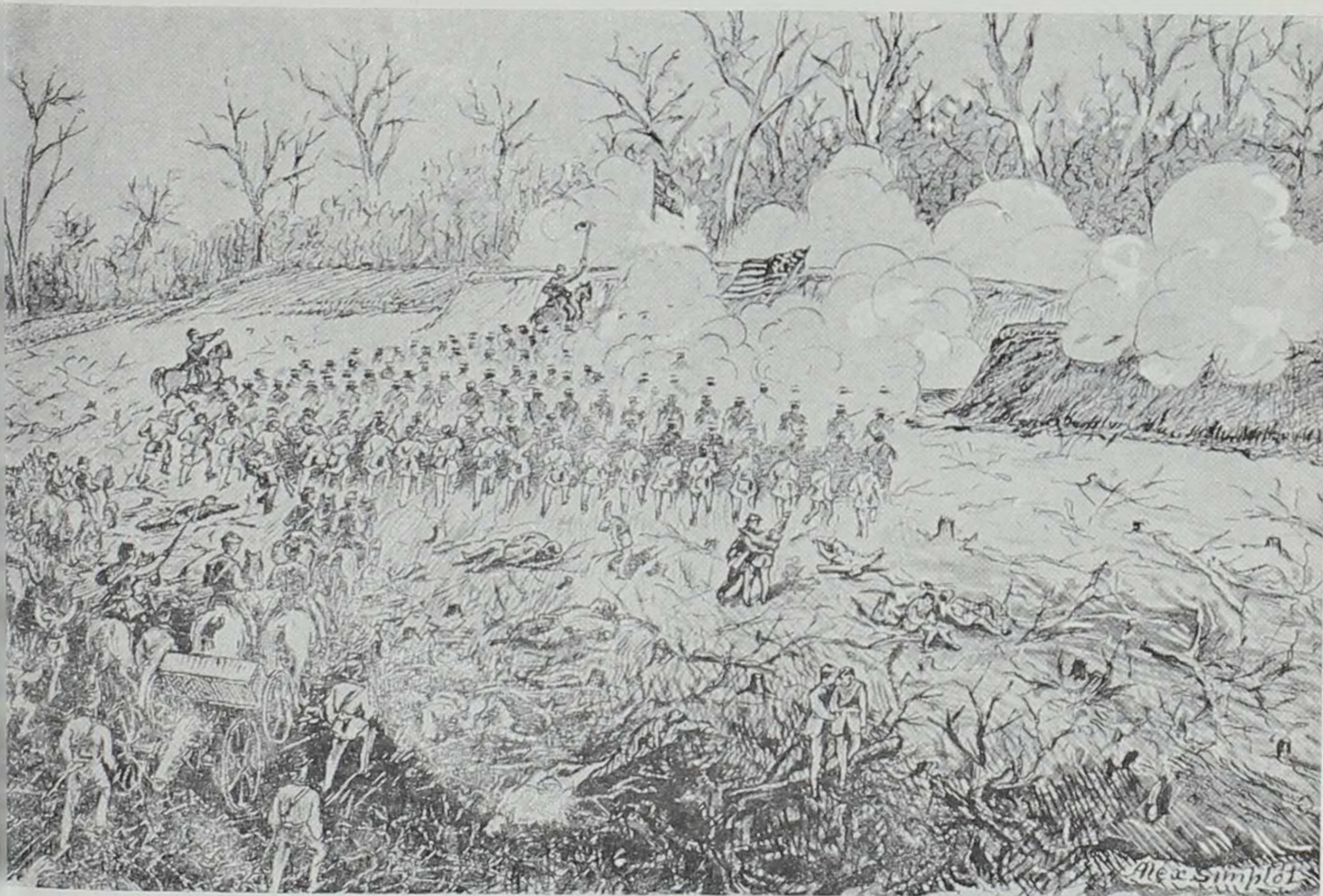
Capture of Fort Henry on the Tennessee River — February 8, 1862.



Harper's Weekly, March 22, 1862

Courtesy Clayton J. Metz

Interior View of Lower Water Batteries which Drove Back Federal Fleet at Fort Donelson.



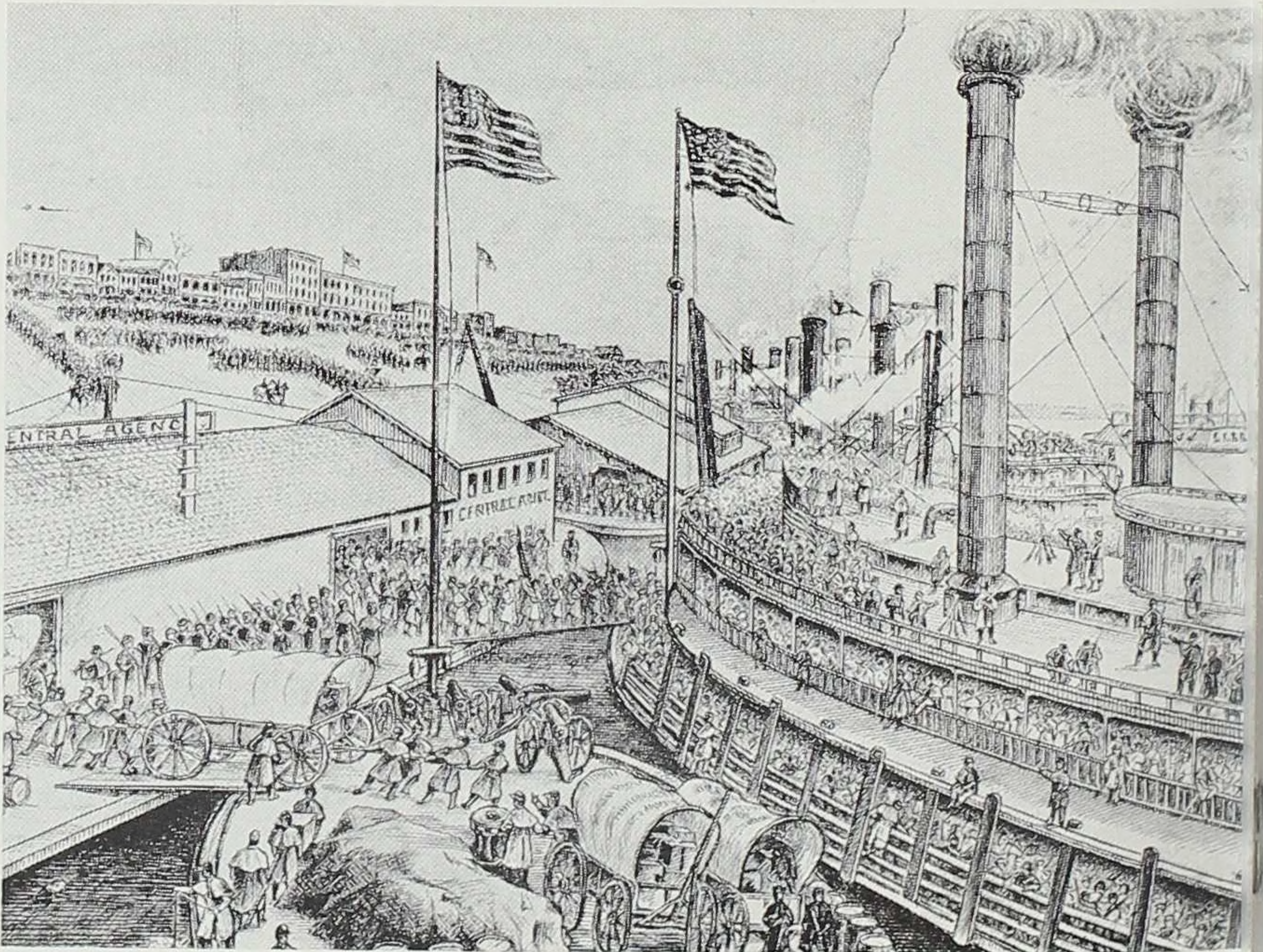
Courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society

2nd and 7th Iowa attack Fort Donelson Redoubt.



Courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society,

Confederates Surprise Federal Troops at Pittsburg Landing — April 6, 1862.



Harper's Weekly, February 1, 1862

Courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society

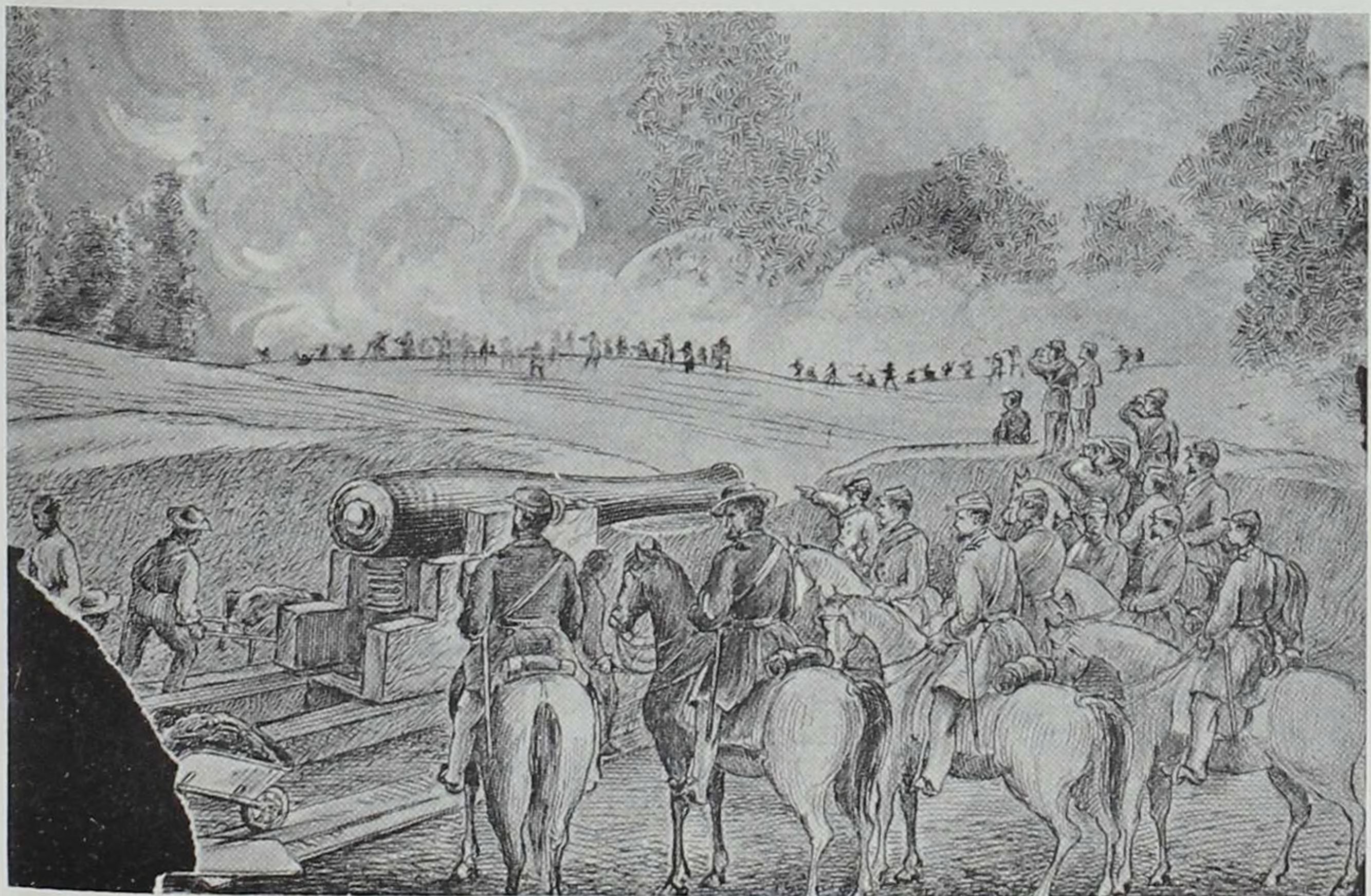
Departure of "Great Mississippi Expedition" Downstream from Cairo.



Harper's Weekly, June 21, 1862

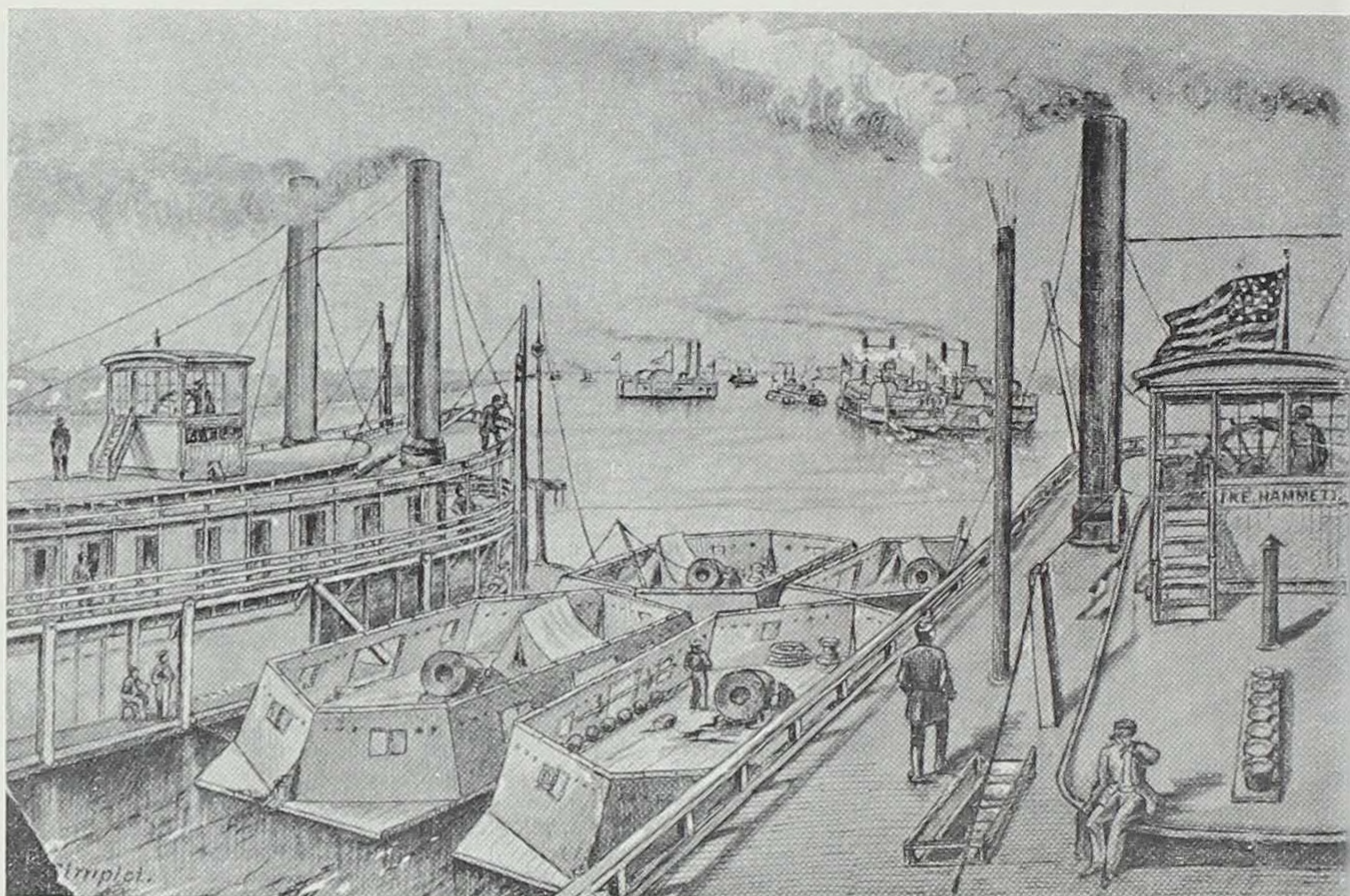
Courtesy Clayton J. Metz

Looking into Corinth from General Pope's Observation Post.



Courtesy Mrs. Jeanne O'Hanlon

Hurriedly Erecting Earthworks During Battle at Corinth.



Harper's Weekly, April 5, 1862

Courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society

Steamboats Towing Mortar Boats, Preceded by Gunboats, to Island No. 10.



Harper's Weekly, May 3, 1862

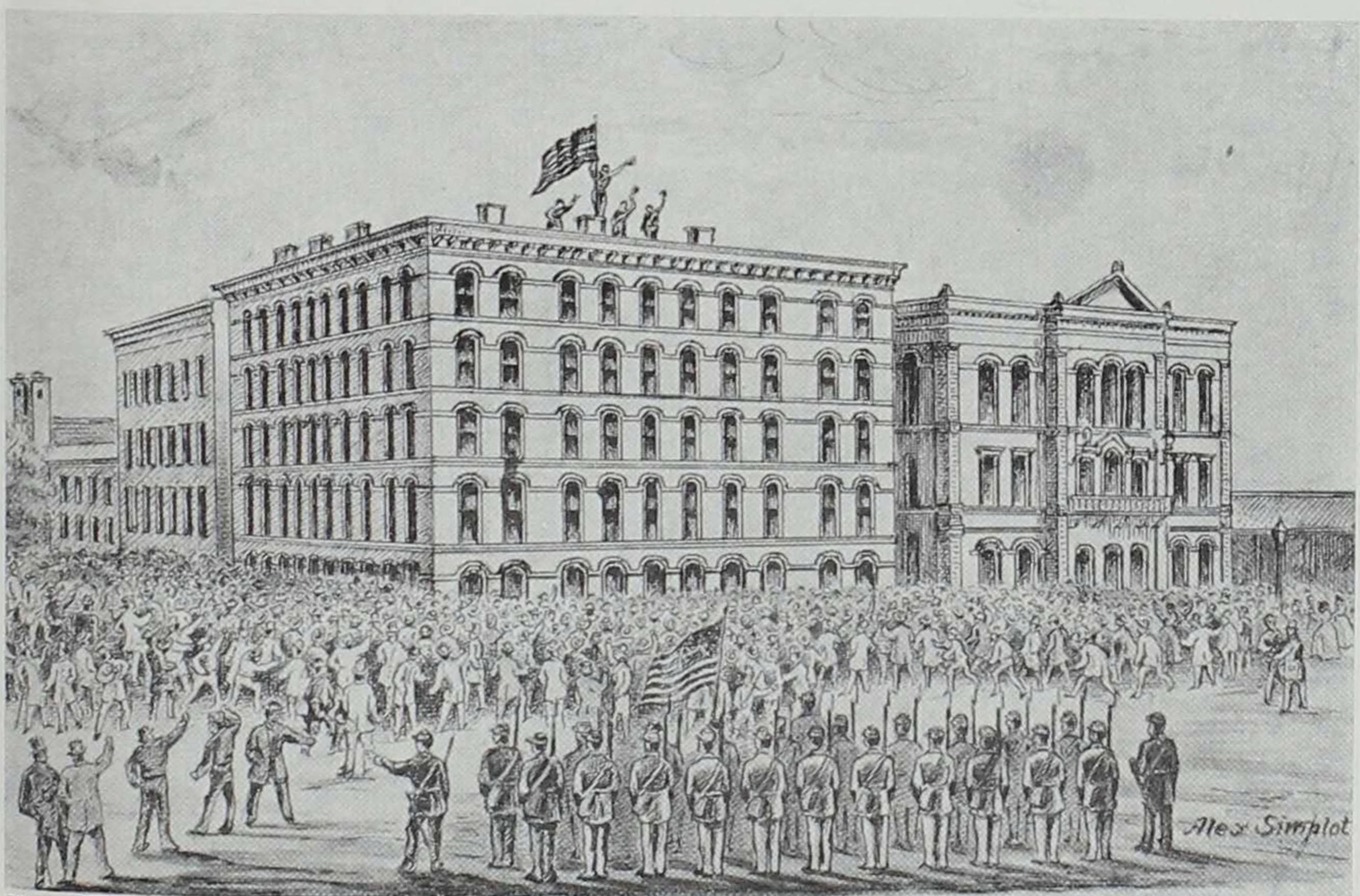
Courtesy Clayton J. Metz

Surrender of Island No. 10 to Commodore Foote — April 7, 1862.



Courtesy Clayton J. Metz

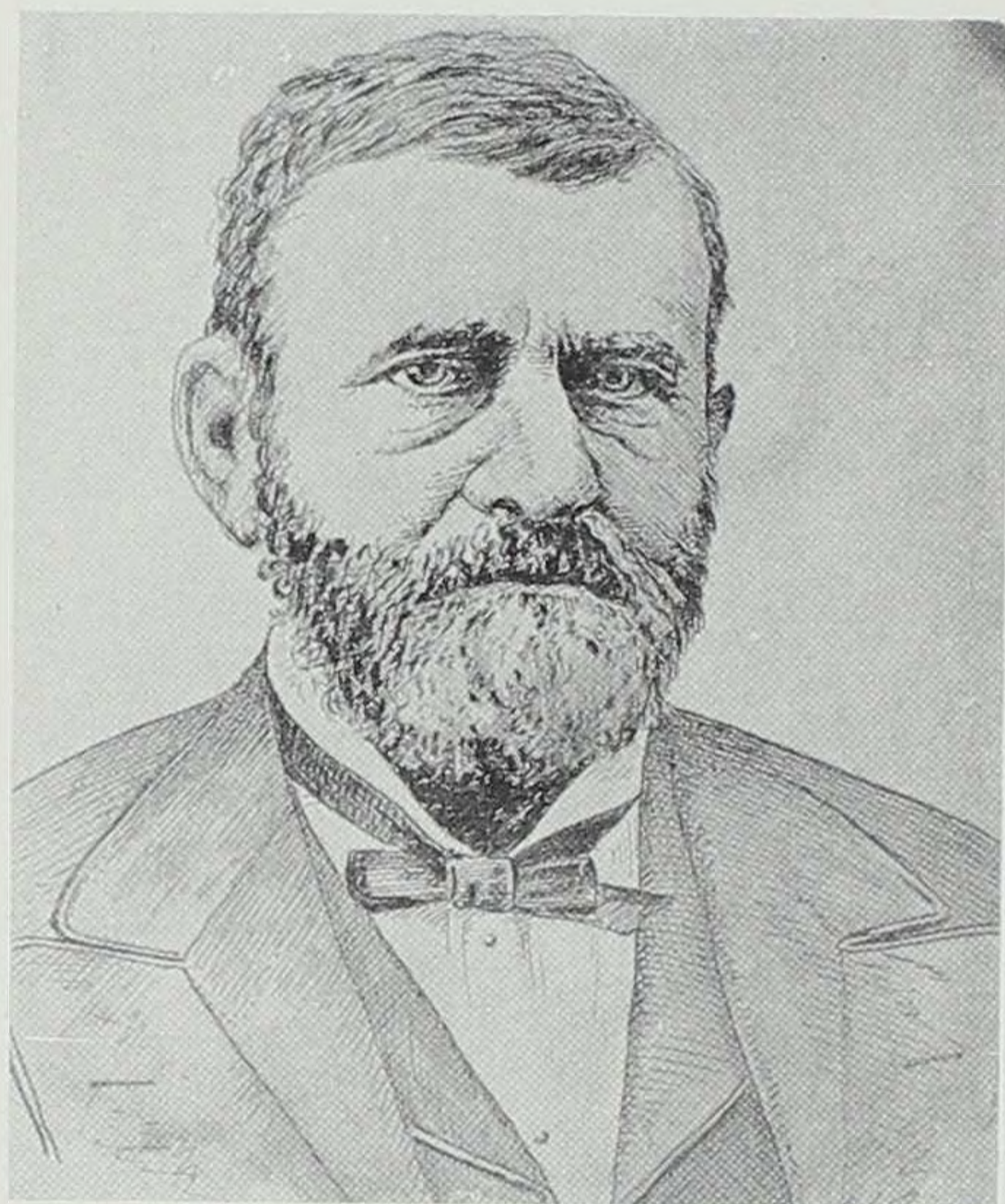
The Great Gunboat Fight before Memphis.



Harper's Weekly, July 5, 1862

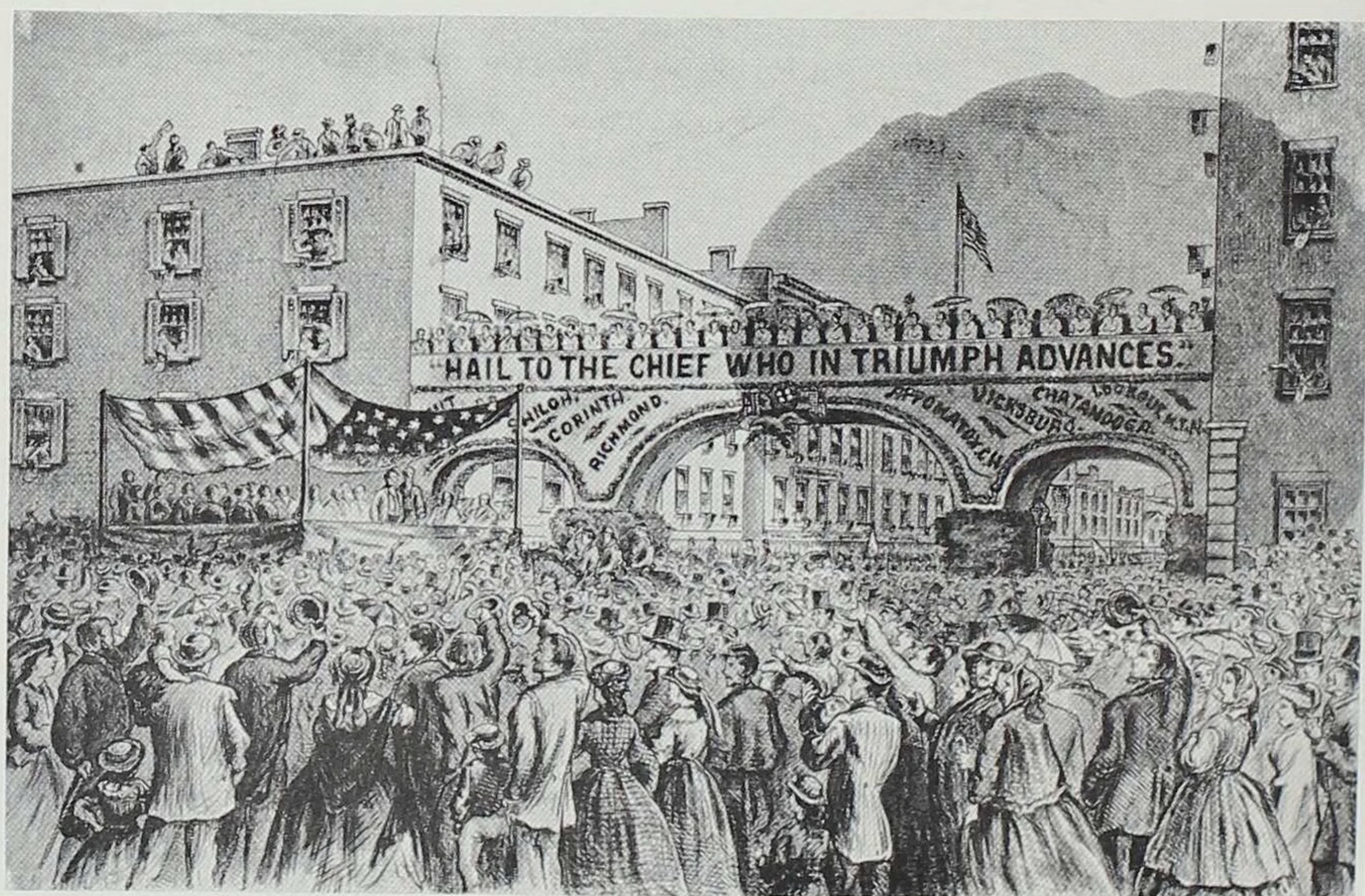
Courtesy Mrs. Jeanne O'Hanlon

Raising the Union Flag over the Post Office at Memphis. By Alexander Simplot



Courtesy Richard Simplot

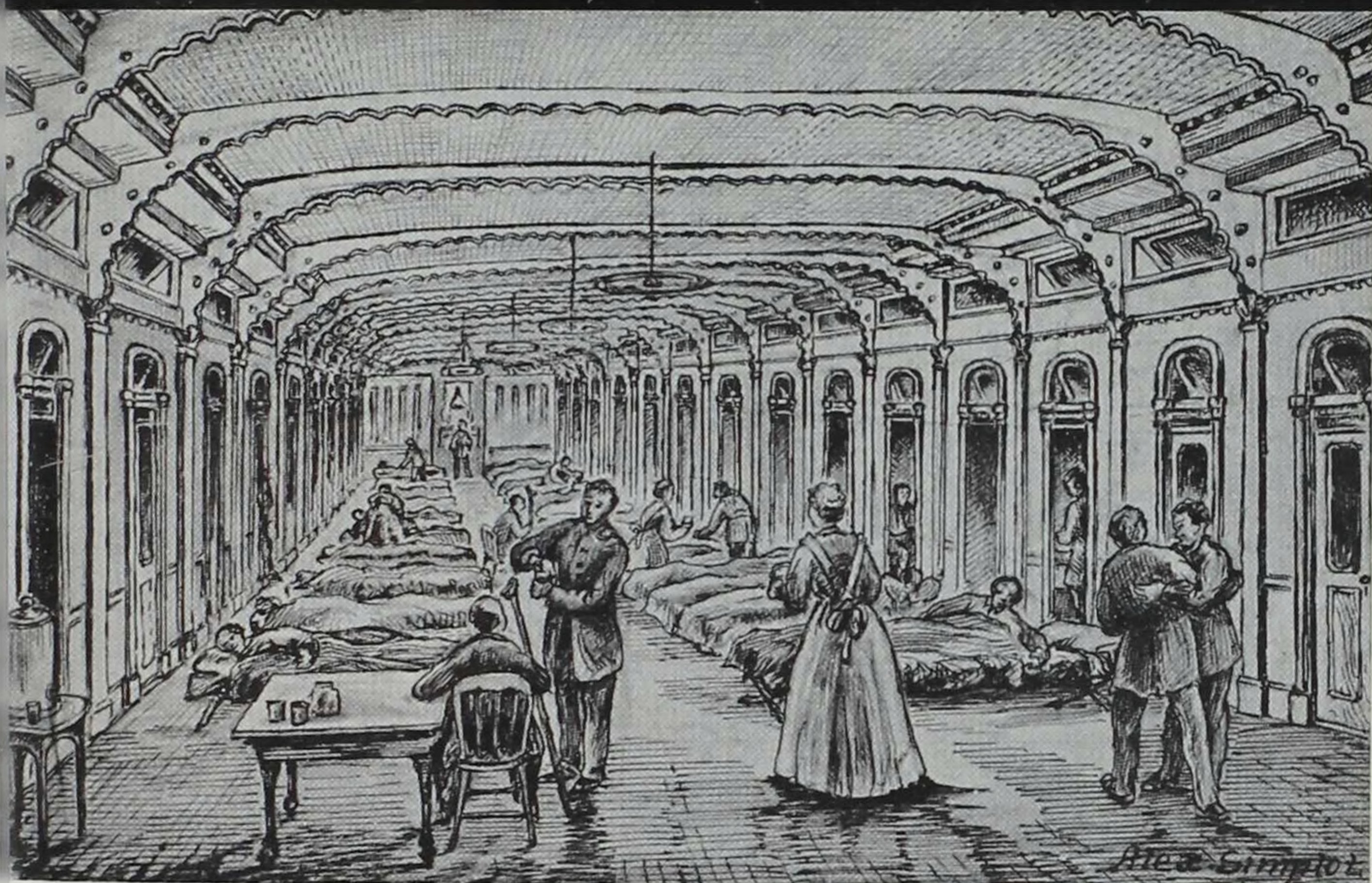
GENERAL U. S. GRANT



Harper's Weekly, September 9, 1865

Courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society

Citizens of Galena, Illinois, Welcome General Grant Home.



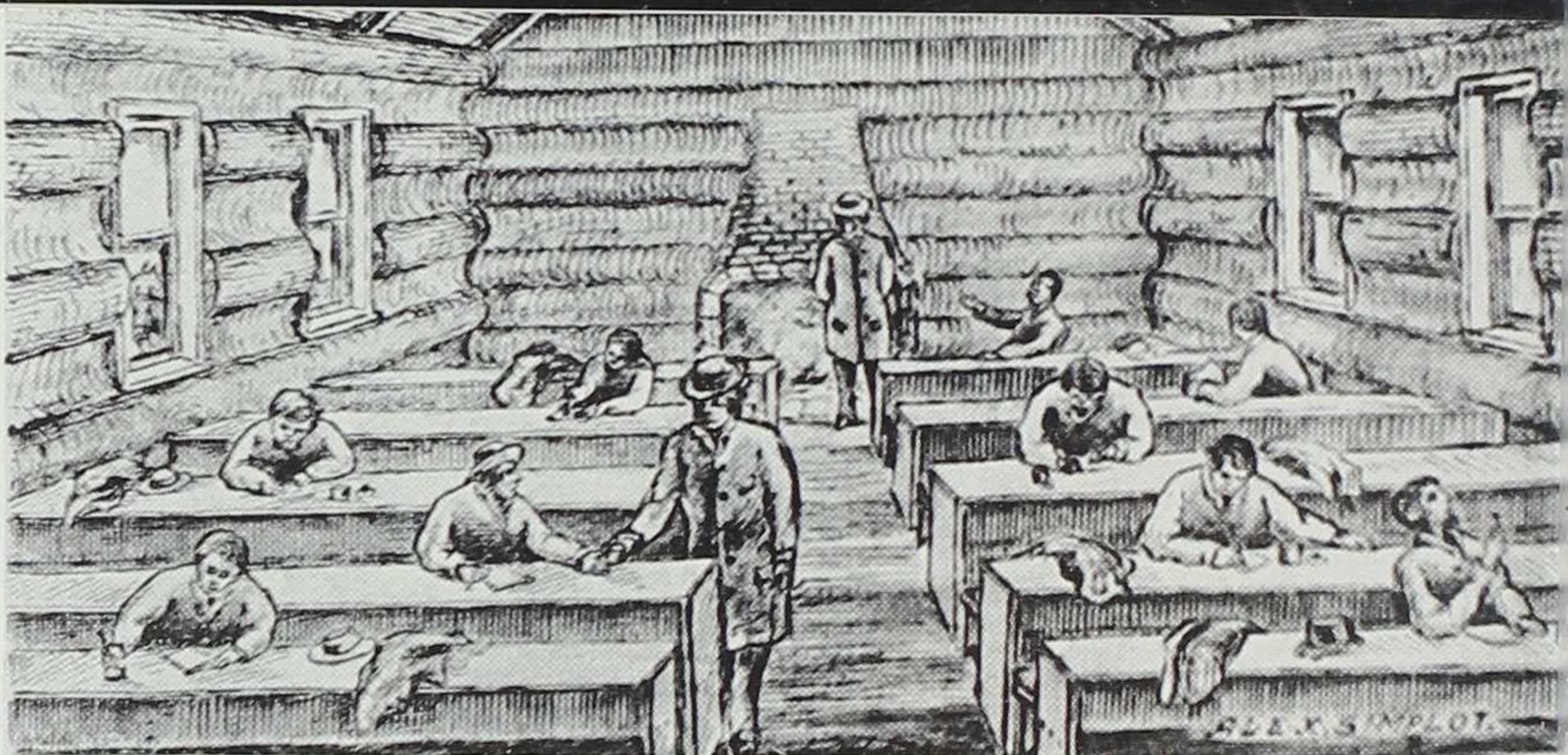
Courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society

Hospital Steamboat *Imperial* Taking the Wounded Aboard After the Battle of Pittsburg Landing. Destination — St. Louis.



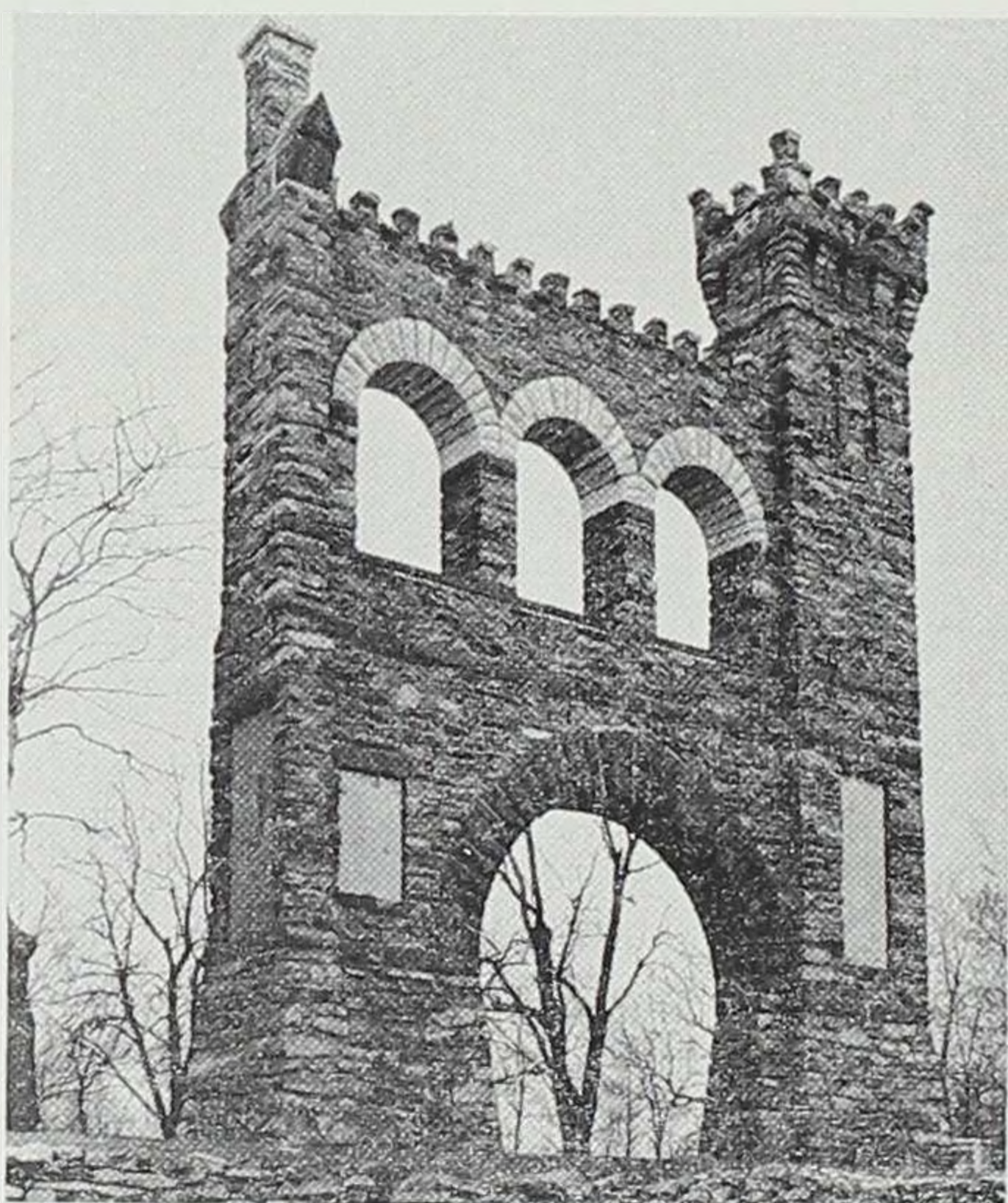
Courtesy Mrs. Jeanne O'Hanlon

Negroes help bury dead at Fort Donelson; Simplot and War Correspondent of the *New York Herald* were the only witnesses. In the rear a Union Soldier partly consumed by a fire over which he had fallen.



Courtesy John Simplot

War Correspondents at Work in an Abandoned Missouri Schoolhouse.



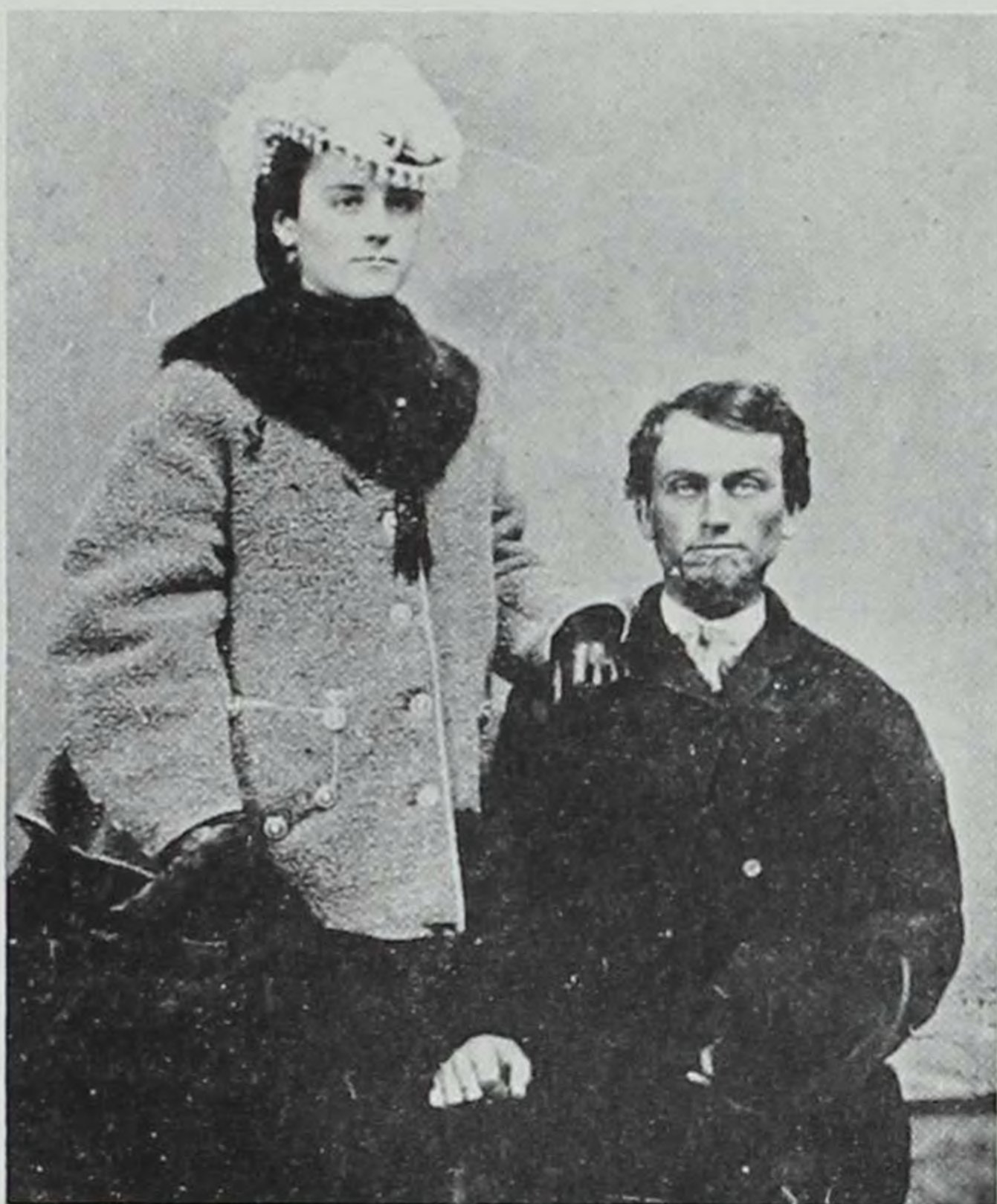
Courtesy Telegraph-Herald

The Name of Franc B. Wilkie is inscribed on a Tablet on this Monument Erected in Memory of the Artists and War Correspondents who covered the Civil War. It is near Antietam Battlefield, at Crampton's Gap, Maryland. Simplot's name, for some unexplained reason, is not included in the list of artists.

A Rare Picture Showing Civil War Correspondents and Special Artists at Play During a Lull in the Fighting. Simplot, with back to viewer, is seen Holding a Boo after Being Hit in the Stomach with a Haversack.

Courtesy John Simplot





Alexander Simplot and his Young Bride, Virginia Knapp of Dubuque, shown after his return from the Civil War.

Courtesy Wisconsin Historical Society



Courtesy Mrs. Anna Simplot Brassell

Simplot Brothers Store at First and Main Street. Simplot made this Sketch about 1890.

Wilkie at the other, when a cannon ball passed between them, at the level of their knees, and smashed through the building. Then began a wild race down the stairway, and halfway down Wilkie was felled when another cannon shot tore through the building over his head. The wound in the back of his head was bloody, but not serious.

Oddly enough, the shots had been fired by the Union artillery. An officer had misinterpreted an order to bring the guns to "bear" on the town and had opened fire instead. In a few minutes, Wilkie had been "repaired" and was ready to continue.

There were serious problems, however, and Wilkie was quick to spot them. General Lyon had over-extended his supply lines and his requests for more men and material were not being fulfilled. Not only did the Federal troops now face a Confederate force that was larger than itself, but the Union troops were out of supplies. Wilkie wrote:

. . . Thanks to red tapeism we are just now in the worst possible condition for a conflict. Our entire available force does not exceed 6,000 men and 18 pieces of artillery. For the last fortnight the men have lived on half rations, and hence have no stomach for a fight. One or two, sometimes three crackers, two cups of coffee, with a moderate supply of beef or salt pork, make up a day's food; frequently even this is cut down to one-half. . . . As for the Iowa Regiment, they are in a complete state of demoralization, at least in all physical respects. All of the men are squalid, ragged, and filthy to the last degree.

Their clothes are in tatters to an extent that would expose them to the contempt of the raggedest crowd that ever gathered at the Five Points. Two hundred and fifty of them are utterly unfitted for travel from the want of shoes; some are entirely barefooted — others have an apology for shoes that would excite the profoundest contempt of the seediest beggar that ever hunted the gutters for bones.

The Iowans were now scheduled to be discharged within two weeks, on August 14, but before that they would prove themselves in combat. After another minor skirmish, the battle of Wilson's Creek was fought on August 10, 1861.

General Lyon, although severely out-numbered by Confederates led by General Sterling Price, chose to attack at Wilson's Creek, just southwest of Springfield, Missouri. In addition, Lyon split up his command, sending Colonel Franz Sigel and some 1,400 men to attack the enemy rear. Sigel's pincher movement failed, he was driven off, and Lyon's forces, including the Iowa First, were forced to stand the repeated attacks of the Confederate majority. Lyon used the First Missouri as his main combat force, holding the Kansas and Iowa regiments in reserve. As the battle continued, the Missouri troops stood charge after charge, then the Kansas First was called up to face the seemingly endless string of attacks. Wilkie described some of the action:

On the east side of the north ravine was a large corn-field, and in this the Secessionists threw two Regiments

with a view to turn the flanks of the Federals. Scarcely had the last files entered the field when both Batteries opened upon them with shell and canister. The distance was not more than two hundred yards and the effect was frightful; it was not simply killing men, it was a wholesale massacre. They went down not by dozens but by fifties; one single shell burst exactly in the centre of what seemed a large crowd of human beings, and the next instant not a soul could be seen in the vicinity. In a few minutes not a man of the enemy who could get away remained in the cornfield. At another time a Louisiana Regiment having a magnificent large flag came suddenly out of the woods, and began forming with great rapidity. Dubois' Artillery paid its respects to them, scattering them like chaff; the flag and bearer went down together. Another man seized it and attempted to climb over the fence with it, but as he was astride the top rail a twelve-pound struck him square in the back, and seemed to scatter him, flag and all as if a keg of gunpowder had suddenly exploded within his body.

Wilkie wrote about the death of General Lyon — a death which would raise Lyon to a position of martyr in the eyes of Union people across the nation — a brave man, sacrificed to overwhelming strength. Wilkie wrote how Lyon was first wounded in the leg, then a flesh wound in the head which bled severely. General Lyon was standing behind the Iowa Regiment color guard:

. . . "If some one will lead us, we will clear that woods with the bayonet." "I will lead you!" said he, and at the same instant a ball entered his breast, passing through his body just above the heart. He fell instantly, and a moment after reaching the ground said: "*Iowa Regiment, you are noble boys!*" A little later he grew weaker, and

his last words were: "FORWARD, MY BRAVE MEN, I WILL LEAD YOU!" He did not live a dozen seconds after being struck by the last ball.

That was the death of Lyon as Wilkie wrote it in 1861, just after the battle. It was a typical death for a soldier of that period, muttering or shouting some phrase or slogan. Just how accurate it was it is hard to say. After the Civil War, Wilkie himself was to write:

I saw many men die during the war, and in no case was there anything distressing in the occurrence. When a man was hit, and believed the wound to be a deadly one, he never grew excited nor frantic over his condition. . . I do not believe there was a single instance in the entire war in which a soldier, knowing that he was about to die, arranged any of the beautiful sentiments so frequently published in some of the newspapers and in a certain class of books. "Tell them that I have cheerfully given my life for my flag and country," is an absurd invention. No dying man ever said it, and no dying man ever thought it.

Franc Wilkie was a realist. He spared his readers no facts when writing about Wilson's Creek. He told how the Iowa Regiment was called upon to fight a rear-guard action so that the shattered Federal forces could retreat:

The Iowa Regiment suffered severely. The gallant Captain [Alexander L.] Mason, of the Color Company, (C,) while urging on his men, received a ball through the thigh, and in ten minutes thereafter was a corpse. His First Lieutenant [William] Purcell, received a mortal wound. Three others of the company were killed in their

tracks, and some ten others wounded, but through all, the Colors never for a single moment kissed the dust, and when the Regiment covered the retreat of the dispirited forces, they still fluttered proudly as ever in the smoke of the battlefield. Poor McHenry, of Company I, rose incautiously on his knee to cap his musket, but had scarcely done so ere a musket ball tore through his head scattering his blood and brains upon his comrades on either side of him. He was dead ere he reached the ground. At one time the company lay upon the ground to avoid a deadly shower of bullets from a point not fifty yards distant. They were ordered to rise and charge upon the cover and drive out the enemy. "Come on, boys," cried George Pierce of the Governor's Greys, springing to his feet and fearlessly facing the storm, "Come on, boys, and let us chase them out!" At that instant a fine looking officer mounted on a magnificent sorrel charger, galloped out in front of the enemy and appeared to urge them to charge. Pierce drew a bead on him with his musket and fired — the officer tumbled like a log from his horse, and almost at the same instant George dropped, shot through the thigh. Sergeant Dettmer, of the Jackson Guards, fell severely wounded, and the handsome Frank Rhomberg, a Private in the same company, fell dead, pierced through the brain.

The courage of the Iowa Volunteers was marked by those in command. In a conversation with Wilkie after Wilson's Creek, Major Sturgis declared:

Your fellows fought like devils, and if any man after this ever says to me that Volunteers won't fight, I'll make it a personal matter with him! Yes, sir, your men fought just like devils!"

I am full in the belief that these emphatic compliments

to the Volunteers, and particularly to the Iowa Regiment, were well earned by the gallant men to whom they were paid. To be sure a few men from each company sneaked from the fight, but there must be cowards of necessity in so large a crowd. The shooting of the enemy with small arms was universally low; they aimed to wound and not to kill, probably knowing that every wounded man required two others to carry him to the rear, thus weakening the force much more than by killing men outright.

By three that afternoon, both forces had retired from the field. The Federals had received a resounding defeat. But the Iowa First had only 11 killed and three missing in its first and only battle. Wilkie stayed with Lyon's battered troops until two the next morning, compiling a complete list of the wounded and dead Iowans. His list not only told who was wounded, but where the bullet had entered and how serious the injury was. When the lists were compiled on Sunday morning, Wilkie and Thomas Knox of the *New York Herald* set out for Rolla, Missouri, the nearest telegraph connection. The route from Springfield to Rolla was through the foothills of the Ozark Mountains and through territory full of Secessionists. On that first night they reached Lebanon, Missouri, and fell dead asleep in the cabin of a Secessionist who put them up for the night. The first day's ride had covered 70 miles, and Wilkie had had no sleep in the preceding 72 hours. He later wrote:

. . . The physical agonies of that day were something

that I shall never forget. Every joint and muscle quivered with pain at each motion of the animal which I rode. I was "dying for sleep" and fell into deep slumber a thousand times, only to be awakened as often by the pain from the jolting motion.

The next day, Monday, the reporters reached Rolla, and Wilkie succeeded in getting the first news of the battle telegraphed back to Dubuque. Then he pushed on to St. Louis. Events there were to lead to an Iowa newspaper "scooping" the country on the first major western battle of the Civil War.

Franc Wilkie was both the western war correspondent of the *Dubuque Herald* and the *New York Times*. When he got to St. Louis, he had expected no money from the *Herald* — they had never sent him a penny — but he discovered that there was also no money or word from the *Times*. Enraged, he decided to give the complete story to the Dubuque paper, since it would at least be interested in how the local boys had done. He took the train for Dubuque and when he landed across the river at East Dubuque (then Dunleith) and took the ferry boat across the Mississippi, he was much surprised by his reception:

. . . We landed, and I went ashore without having seen a soul that I knew, and then started up the narrow street. It was dark as a pocket, and I had no apprehension of being known, at least before reaching Main Street. I had not gone a hundred yards when I heard a rush of feet and a clamor of voices approaching me on the levee. In a mo-

ment or two three or four people met me, clasped my hands, congratulating me on my safe return, and began asking for news from the "boys." Meanwhile, other rushing feet were heard; and almost in less time than I can tell it, the levee was swarming with an eager, tumultuous crowd. As we advanced toward the main street the throng increased, and by the time we entered on the gas-lighted region the mass of people crowded the street from curb to curb in a crush that was terrific.

Inch by inch I pushed up the street, being shaken by the hand, and answering a thousand times the question — "How did you leave the 'boys'?" "Where are they?" "When will they be at home?" and "Did you see So-and-So?" and so on without limit. It would have taken me ten minutes to have reached my home, if uninterrupted; as it was, I finally gained shelter at half-past two the next morning. My right hand was wrung out of all shape, and I suffered for days untold pain in my arms and shoulders.

Wilkie's complete story of the battle and the death of General Lyon was printed in the *Dubuque Herald*, which thereby scooped the nation's press. The *New York Times* was panic-stricken by its oversight in not paying more attention to the reporter from Iowa. They wired, "Retain place, by all means" and money was soon on the way. The Iowa First was mustered out of the service on August 21, 1861, in St. Louis, but Franc Wilkie would soon be heading back to the wars.

Franc Wilkie was soon assigned to go to St. Louis where Major General John Charles Fremont was preparing to launch an attack. Fremont's reputation was staggering. He was known as the

"Pathfinder of the West" for his explorations with Kit Carson, had been a United States Senator from California, and the Republican party's first candidate for president, although he lost the election to James Buchanan in 1856. Now he was in command of the Department of the West. But things had not been going well and Wilkie was soon to be present at another Union defeat. From General Sam Sturgis, a friend from the battle of Wilson's Creek, Wilkie learned that Sturgis was about to lead a relief column to save Federal forces encircled by Confederate General Sterling Price at Lexington, Missouri. There was just time enough for Sturgis to buy Wilkie a drink, then they were off. A column of artillery and other troops scheduled to join with Sturgis, never materialized and the Union commander soon came to realize that he had only 1,200 men, none of whom had ever been in battle. Wilkie wrote:

Sturgis had a horse, and I had a mule. We were the only mounted men in an expedition having for its object the penetration of an unknown and hostile country, and the rout or capture of 20,000 rebels.

At last Sturgis decided that he could not attack the Confederate forces that encircled Lexington, and headed on to Kansas City. But newspaper correspondent Franc Wilkie decided that he could attack. Mounted on a horse provided by a Confederate who lived in the area, Wilkie went "howling" down the road toward Lexington. His cour-

age was somewhat bolstered, however, by his drinking.

Nearly or quite two quarts of champagne were boiling through my brain, whose result was a desire to gallop like the wind, and to yell like the devil at intervals of about ten seconds.

No one was more surprised than Confederate General Price when Wilkie appeared and announced, "I have come voluntarily to your camp, trusting to your well-known chivalry, and relying upon my character as a member of a non-combatant profession."

Price felt certain that Wilkie was a spy. But one of the General's officers recognized Wilkie's name.

"Were you at the battle of Wilson's Creek?"

"Yes."

"Did you write the account of the battle which was copied afterward in the St. Louis Republican?"

"I did."

The officer turned to General Price.

"General, I will say this much for the gentleman. That account was a particularly fair one, and seemed to be written by a man disposed to do justice to both sides."

And so Franc Wilkie was not hanged as a spy. He was taken in charge and led throughout the lines so that he could observe the battle. For once he was in front, instead of behind, Federal bullets.

When the Union troops finally were forced to surrender, Wilkie was given a horse and safe conduct back through the lines to St. Louis. His account of the battle, from the Confederate side, was a sensation in the New York papers. The *Times* called his exploits "unparalleled in the history of journalism" and his pay was raised to \$30 a week, plus all expenses. His wife received a present of \$25 from the *Times*. And Franc Wilkie, the country boy from Iowa, was put in charge of covering the war in the West.

After the defeats at Wilson's Creek and Lexington, General Fremont was frantic and decided to take the field himself and drive his army straight through to New Orleans. His first problem, however, would be to find and defeat the illusive and wily General Price. This, in his famous march of 100 days, Fremont failed to do and was eventually removed from command by President Lincoln.

When Wilkie arrived at Jefferson City, Missouri, where Fremont was gathering his army, he found a large group of reporters and artists awaiting the coming "action." Among them was Alexander Simplot, the former Dubuque schoolteacher who had been sketching for *Harper's Weekly*. The correspondents, who had nothing whatever to report, dubbed themselves the "Bohemian Brigade" because of their gay carefree life. On the entire 500-mile march there was no major battle to

report and the artists and writers were taken good care of by Fremont's staff.

A Lieutenant Morrissey was placed in charge of the correspondents and Simplot said that the newsmen and artists were known as "Morrissey's Mess." Writing after the war, Simplot described how each day's ride ended on that march:

On the eve of each night's encampment, after our ride of eight or ten miles a day, we found our tent up, occupying the righthand side, second to the end of the headquarters camp, a load of hay or straw having been dumped in the central open space, from which our "contraband" (negro) toward evening generously strewed sufficient to form a bedding upon which, with the aid of a few blankets, to rest the pencil shovers' weary bones.

Although there was little for Wilkie to write about on the march of 15,000 men, there was plenty for Simplot to sketch and the pages of *Harper's* were filled with drawings of men marching, crossing streams, making camp, and engaging in all military activities except fighting. Franc Wilkie wrote:

In every essential respect the campaign of Fremont is the greatest humbug and farce in history. Weeks were taken up in preparation to meet an enemy at a certain point many miles distant who had no existence. . . . The entire operation was a gigantic picnic, whose main qualities were display, vanity, ostentation, demoralization, and all sorts of rascally developments.

Simplot and Wilkie soon found that there was

some excitement. One night they listened in horror while their old friend General Sturgis called General Jim Lane of Kansas an "assassin, a thief, a scoundrel of the vilest description." It was all said over peach brandy and Lane, a crude Kansan who had ravaged the Missouri countryside in the name of the Union, took it good-naturedly. The peach brandy finally ended the argument and Simplot and Wilkie had to see to it that the two generals got back to their quarters.

The next night, seated in an abandoned log cabin, Sturgis suggested a game of draw poker. Simplot "responded meekly that he never played any game for money." Wilkie said he was willing to learn, but that he had no money. The General loaned him a ten-dollar piece and the game began. Wilkie, perhaps on "beginner's luck," won.

. . . I won so fast that I was ashamed of it, and surreptitiously passed the most of my gains to Simplot. After the breaking up of the game Simplot disgorged about seventy dollars. I believed myself the greatest poker-player of the ages.

Subsequent evenings of poker playing proved that this was not true. During the march, the only major "battles" were the horseplay among the writers and artists. When the army finally reached Springfield, Missouri, it fought a minor action against the rear guard of the Confederates. Fremont's 100 days were over and he was removed from command.